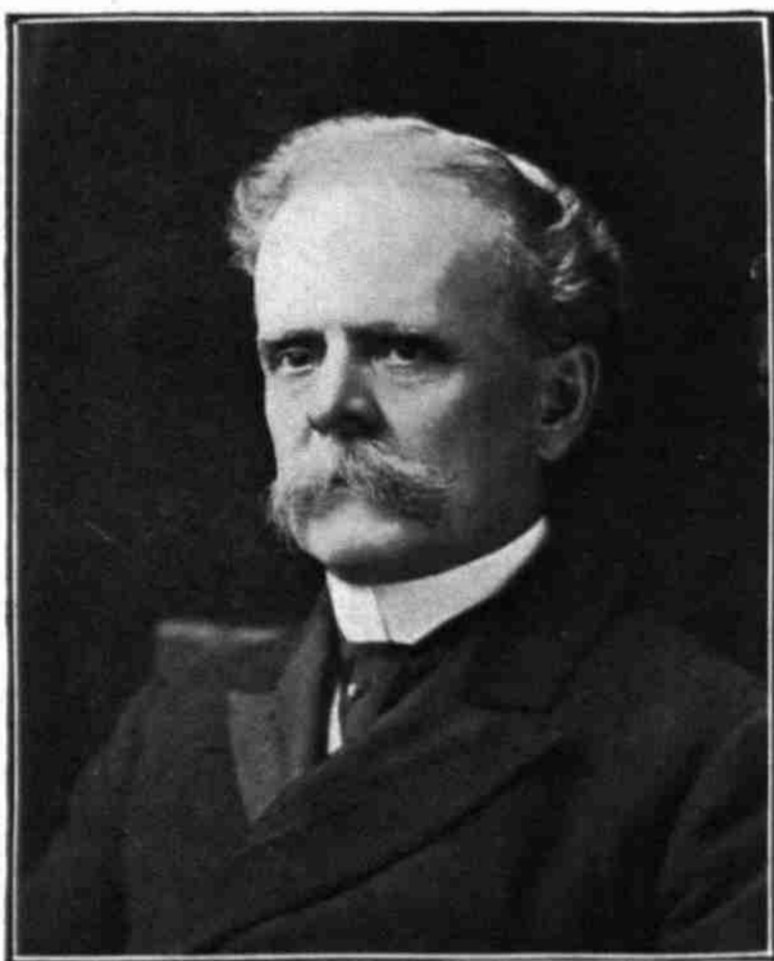


Our Most Imperative Missionary Enterprise

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IT may seem invidious to select one form of missionary enterprise, and to insist that it is more imperative than another. I am aware also that my words on this subject will be discounted because I write not simply as an individual, but also as President of the American Missionary Association.



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The opinion here expressed, however, is one which I have long held, and to which I have often given utterance. No one values more highly the service which the American Board is rendering in foreign fields or the great Home Missionary Society in our own land. Both are beyond praise. But the demands on neither of them, important as they surely are, have the immediate urgency which belongs to the task which

the American Missionary Association has undertaken. This work appeals to me at the present time as the most imperative of all forms of Christian activity which face the American churches and for the following reasons:

The colored people are here by no volition of their own.

They were brought here by our fathers against their will. It may have been for the ultimate elevation of the race, but no credit for that is due either to ourselves or to our ancestors.

They constitute about one ninth of the population of the Republic.

They are in a land which they never would have sought of their own accord. They are here by compulsion.

All the benefits that they have received are due to Providence.

Under such circumstances they have a right to demand of us what no other class which comes to our shores has any reason to expect, and what those farther away could not claim.

This work is most imperative for us because it belongs exclusively to the American people. Foreign missions are the task of all Christian nations, and are undertaken by all. England and Germany divide with America the honor of heroic and consecrated missionary activity in many lands, but neither Great Britain nor Germany will do anything for the improvement of the millions of colored people on our shores. On a field so evidently our own, we should resent any intrusions by other nations.

The great majority of the colored people are as degraded as any in Africa or on the islands of the southern seas to whom missionaries are sent. They have been given rights for which they were not prepared and thus a false independence has grown up within many of them. . . . Of course I am speaking only of the mass and not of the splendid examples of consecrated ability, culture, and character which show so clearly what the race may become. But those who have been trained in the schools, colleges, and churches, and those who have risen like Washington, DuBois, Price, Tanner, Henderson, Proctor, and others, are few compared with those who have hardly felt the touch of higher things. This people need ethical and spiritual ideals as much as any in non-Christian lands. They ought to have better conditions, better standards of character, better homes, and a better type of religion. This mass of ignorance and depravity is at our own doors, and was brought here by our fathers. It is an example of foreign missions in the heart of the American republic.

For these reasons, and without detracting in the least from the credit due to other forms of missionary activity which may be more urgent at another time, I believe that the American Missionary Association is engaged in what is just now the most imperative Christian work which the American churches have laid upon them. It appeals to the Christian and to the patriot alike. It ought to have a support which it has never yet had. There is not very much romance about it; it has little in the way of fame or glory to offer, but it is a cause which can be evaded only at the cost of peril to our republic, as well as loss to the humanity of which we are a part.

The American people should unite in a crusade in behalf of the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical elevation of the millions of Africans within our own borders. The best way to save ourselves is not by vain endeavors to suppress the colored man; the only way to save ourselves and our nation is by uniting in a common effort for his elevation.